

THE GREAT SEARCH.

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WHEN, in the early days of 1917, it was realised that the time had come for Count Bernstorff to retire from the scene of his highly unsuccessful labours, both diplomatic and undiplomatic, in the United States, a steamer had to be found sufficiently large to convey to Europe not only himself and his staff, but also about 120 German consuls, of varying degrees, from the different States and cities hitherto favoured with their society.

To these Herren (not to say "gentlemen") were attached a large collection of Frauen (not to say "ladies"), with children and nurses, their servants, their maids, and everything that was theirs. Besides these, a large number of neutrals, not necessarily connected with the Germans, decided to take advantage of the occasion; so that altogether there came to be about 800 persons to be accommodated for the journey to Europe. The fine Danish steamer *Fredrik VIII* was accordingly chartered for the trip.

It was arranged between the Governments concerned that if, on her passage to Europe, the vessel put in at Halifax, Nova Scotia, for search, she should be allowed free passage through the Allied blockade on reaching European waters, and that the "Right of Visit and Search" on the High Seas

should be forgone, so that she could proceed direct to Copenhagen, her destination.

It was further arranged that sacks of diplomatic documents from Allied or Neutral Embassies could be carried, if they were registered and sealed at the British Embassy at Washington, and if the diplomatic messengers in charge of them received on their passports a special "visa" from our Ambassador. With the exception of these diplomatic "sacks," it was announced that every part of the great ship, every piece of luggage, every article of cargo, and every single person conveyed in her, including the crew, was liable to search.

All, all—except Count Bernstorff himself, that Sacred Ambassador; and he would be immune only if he would give (as he did give) a signed undertaking that he was not carrying on his Sacred Person documents, or indeed anything, either within or without It, except the clothes that covered It.

The harbour of Halifax is, in shape, long and narrow, and fairly straight. On approaching from seaward you pass up between gradually narrowing shores, fairly high on both hands, and reach the harbour proper, after making a bend round the tail of a small islet that divides the inner from the outer part. Here, within, are

the town wharves, the naval dockyard, the man-of-war anchorage, and the dry dock.

Steaming straight on past them, you come to a Narrows, a couple of hundred yards wide; and on passing through it, you find you are entering on a magnificent sheet of land-locked water, deep and still, bordered with forest, and with only a few signs of human possession—Bedford Basin.

This basin was arranged to be the searching place for the *Fredrik VIII*: partly in order that the very considerable daily traffic in the harbour, both of men-of-war and merchant vessels, should not be impeded by the presence of yet another large hull, swinging round its anchor; and partly because it was very undesirable that the alien enemies conveyed in the ship, well provided as they were with eyes, prism binoculars, and cameras, should thus be enabled to make a fairly leisurely study of the defences of the port, or of the arrivals and sailings (particularly of transports), that might take place during their stay in its waters.

In order to obviate, indeed, even a passing glimpse of the fortified scenery, while *en route* to Bedford Basin, it was stipulated and arranged, before the *Fredrik VIII* left New York, that she was to arrive off Halifax not earlier than 7 P.M.; and thus should pass through the harbour during complete darkness,—for it was February, and there was no moon at the time. A special pilot

was sent by rail from Halifax to New York, to join the ship there,—to make the passage in her, and to bring her straight into the harbour, and on into Bedford Basin without any delay.

In spite of these precautions, and of the orders, twice repeated, for the night entry, given at New York to the (Danish) captain of the *Fredrik VIII*, the vessel arrived at 9 A.M., in full daylight; and before anything could be done to prevent it, she had come most of the way up the harbour, before being turned back by the patrol vessel, and given orders to wait outside until the evening.

By this means, two excellent if fleeting views were obtained by the passengers of the defences—once on entering, and once on leaving; but as all cameras and films were relentlessly collected by us later on, no permanent record remained with them to support and embellish mental impressions; and probably little advantage was derived from this characteristic outpouring of German war funds, on behalf of "Intelligence."

It has already been remarked that the month was February; and in the pleasant climate of that part of Nova Scotia, this means a winter banquet, with, for *hors d'œuvres*, bitter frost, proceeding to a thick brown soup, that is dished up in the brimming streets by the next day's alternation of rain, snow, and thaw, and is speedily followed

by prolonged courses of Arctic conditions.

With their arrival, the steep wet hillsides of Halifax turn into ice glissades; the sea congeals, sending up, as it does so, thick wisps of a vapour resembling steam in all but temperature, and, in the course of a few days, Bedford Basin is covered with a sheet of ice that is from one foot to three feet in thickness.

The harbour itself, however, is only ice-bound along those parts of its shores where the tidal streams are least felt. Floes, together with smaller chunks of ice, broken off from the edge of the Bedford Basin sheet and elsewhere, sail up and down the tidal fairway continuously; fairly innocuous to strongly built steamships, but real dangers, with their sharp corners, and sullen, unresilient bulk, to small craft, and especially to wooden-sided man-of-war steamboats.

It was into scenery and conditions of this nature that the *Fredrik VIII* penetrated on the evening of February 16, 1917. H.M.S. *Devonshire*, the British cruiser detailed to carry out the examination, had already on that day forced her way from the harbour through the thickening ice into a convenient part of Bedford Basin, and had anchored there to await her unwilling guest.

It was nearly 10 P.M. before the Danish steamer, forcing for herself another lane through the heavy ice-sheet, brought up at anchor at a couple of hundred yards' distance.

The *Devonshire's* steamboats,

carrying the boarding officer and armed guard to take military charge of the vessel, were altogether unable to cut their way through the ice even for this short distance. They were therefore compelled to go back along the already congealing lane made in the wake of the *Devonshire* on her advance that afternoon into the basin, until reaching the point, nearly a mile away, where the track of the *Fredrik VIII* crossed it, and then to turn sharply about and to follow up the wide path in the ice just made by the latter vessel, and so fetch up alongside her at her anchorage.

As this journey had to be done in thick darkness, amidst large and dangerous blocks of ice floating in both lanes, it may be imagined that it was one of considerable difficulty; and it was not until after midnight that the welcome signal was flashed across to the *Devonshire* that all was safely accomplished.

The Great Search began at seven o'clock on the following morning.

According to International Law, the right of visit and search of neutral merchant vessels in war-time, by belligerents, may alone be exercised by the armed naval forces of the Crown, or republic, and, until the late war, on the high seas only.

It is thus illegal for a civilian, or even a civilian Department of State, to undertake such a search; and if searches were still to be made on the high seas (more especially if the sea

were high), one wonders what the sentiments would be of any civilian Department confronted with such a duty!

The size of modern vessels, often thirty to fifty times that of the ships of the Good Old Days, the quantity and complexity of their cargoes, the vast variety of stow-holes and "pockets," outside the legitimate holds, suitable for the conveyance of contraband, the armies of individuals they can and do carry, each one of them a possible *contrabandista*, have combined to render search on the high seas in these days a mere futility; and, for the mutual convenience of both hunter and prey (since escape is impossible), the operation usually takes place in harbour.

The nice point arises, however, when a vessel is brought for search into a port such as Halifax, where the Government is "Dominion," and has no naval forces of its own available for the purpose, as to how far, taking its stand on the sovereignty of the three-mile limit, that domination can be exercised. Who was to conduct and be in charge of the visit and search on this occasion—the British Navy or the Canadian Government? The point was so nice that nothing was done to interfere with, or to spoil its niceness.

A multitude (whom no man could number, as it varied from day to day), somewhere in the region of 200 officials, male and female, was sent, or lent (one never knew which) by the Canadian Government, to "assist" in the search.

It will be realised that the simple sailor was, no doubt, entirely unfitted to deal with such matters as censorship of letters (in many languages), or, still more, with the laying bare of the secrets of the female Hun, of whom, in this case, considerable numbers existed. It would have spoilt his simplicity. Thus, in these two matters of languages and ladies alone, the expert and the female expert were both required, thoroughly to deal with the situation.

Besides these, sent by the Canadian Post Office and Customs respectively, were many from the Police, and Immigration Departments, the latter being especially skilled in wrong 'uns, and their passports.

A search of the most penetrating nature was thus possible; and very soon after it began, the obviousness of its character as a naval affair forced itself to the front, for several excellent reasons.

A large passenger steamer, such as the *Fredrik VIII*, is, as every one who has travelled by water knows, an amazing warren of passages, with ladder-ways, gangways, doors, skylights, and hatches leading to decks, saloons, cabins, and other compartments.

Not only had the person of each inhabitant of the ship (about 920 in number, including the crew) to be examined in turn, but also the cabin, and part of the ship he or she inhabited; and, as soon as the personal search was over, those who had been "gone through"

(to put it vulgarly), could not be permitted to mingle with those who had not.

Similarly, access could not be granted to the great unsearched, to cabins and places already scrutinised. Contraband letters, &c., would instantly have found their way into them; and the work would have been all to do again. Also, it was quite impossible to "do" the whole of the ship and passengers in one day (as a matter of fact, it took ten), and thus arose the necessity for armed force, in the form of sentries by day and by night at every possible point of access to already searched cabins, to ensure the isolation of their occupants. At one time there were forty-eight of such sentries about the ship.

This was the first of the naval reasons that manifested itself, and the second was like unto it.

Almost the first of the orders given to the *Fredrik VIII* stated that no communication of any kind whatever would be permitted between ship and shore, whether by individuals, by letter, or by telegram; and the wireless apparatus was dismantled on her arrival.

Thus was the theory of a "High Seas" search maintained; and great was the discomfort of the newspaper folk in consequence. Some of these had even taken passage in the *Fredrik VIII* from New York, intending to get off at Halifax, and thence return home, full of stories. But with the *Fredrik VIII* they sailed, full to the brim, yet silent—

packages, as it were, of gramophone records—to Europe!

The proper carrying out of this order was ensured by more sentries, posted at every gangway, and by a constant boat-patrol. The latter, it may be said, was greatly assisted (and also circumscribed) by the Arctic conditions of the sea: the thick ice-sheet, seamed by lanes and patches of open water, entirely preventing access, either by foot over the ice, or by anything that floated, except the larger-sized steam launches, capable of ice-breaking, with which there could be no secrecy of movement.

A third naval argument was conveyed and intimated by the presence of officers of the *Devonshire*, with detachments of her men under them, at every search (save those, of course, in which *Die Frauen* were involved); as it was realised that the German official, quite properly, would consider the whole operation to be an act of war, and, as such, would resent its being undertaken by a mere civilian in plain clothes.

Practically every officer of the cruiser, of whatever branch, took part in the proceedings, with the Commander in charge. They formed the constant and accepted referees on disputed points; they gave dignity and point to the whole proceeding, and by their presence lent to the search its proper military aspect. Without them, indeed, it would have something resembled the ordeal of an emigrant steamer in peace time in the clutches of an

unusually drastic Customs authority.

Of our assistant searchers, indeed, both male and female, it may be said that their inquisitiveness had its only rival in the X-ray apparatus. With long experience they insisted, for example, on the removal of all "dentures," to see if, between the plate and the roof of the mouth, 'twixt false and true, there might lie any delicately secreted document. The tongue, we know, may be an unruly member, but the teeth, anyway, might be counted on for retention. In fact, from the crown of the head, including the "taking down" of the most elegant *coiffures* (whatever may be the German equivalent), to the sole of the foot, they investigated every possibility of the human form as a place of concealment, extending even to false toe-nails laid over the real article.

Hiding-places so recondite would scarcely have occurred to uninstructed seamen; and even in their duties as sentries they were not always so *rusé* as was necessary under present circumstances. One grand lady who, having been searched, was now being guarded from contact with the others, was, fortunately, caught in time by one of the officers, just succeeding in getting through the cordon. She had first attempted to do so (but unsuccessfully) by cajolery; and then in the best melodramatic manner—"Unhand me, wretch!"—was pushing past a sentry and his fixed

bayonet, which the poor man felt could not suitably be used for impaling "a lady." On being stopped by the officer, she attempted tears, and ad-duced the necessity of going to her starving baby on the (unsearched) deck below. Inquiry then elicited that it had been—of course purposely—arranged by her that she should have her cabin on one deck, her nurse and baby on a second, and her husband on a third, thus offering irresistible claims for free passage between them.

It was next found that the "baby" was a well-grown boy of three or four years, and not "starving" at all; and on his being stripped for search, before reunion with his mother, he was found to be a walking letter-box. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ!*

But it must be recorded that though none of our victims exhibited any enjoyment in the processes of investigation (in which we may sympathise), there was not usually any rudeness or opposition offered. The tenor was one rather of injured and outraged innocence, with remarks as to the absurdity of the search, and the important character given to it. One and all, however, were shocked at the irreverence shewn towards the holy baggage of the Ambassador, and towards that shrine, his cabin!

Besides providing sentries and boat-patrols, the *Devonshire's* ship's company were engaged in overhauling every hole and corner of the ship, and in assisting the Carpenter's

party in removing panelling in the cabins, opening or piercing mattresses and cushions, searching ventilating shafts (always very fruitful for letters), and going through the many hundreds of lockers and drawers in the ship.

Whilst the deck hands and others were thus employed, practically the whole of the engine-room department of the *Devonshire*, with their officers, were engaged in the search of the coal bunkers, engines, auxiliary engines, and boilers of the *Fredrik VIII*. The coal was all turned over, the boilers were emptied and examined in turn, and the main engines and auxiliaries moved, so that any documents or other contraband which might have been concealed in them should be destroyed, or rendered illegible.

Even the cold-storage room was emptied of its contents, not unavailingly!

Letters were found in every possible part of the ship, and, together with "dental rubber" in small flat pieces, formed a large proportion of the contraband discovered.

A spare cabin in the *Fredrik VIII* was allotted to the Commander of the *Devonshire* to serve as an "office," and occasionally he slept there, when night searches (usually very prolific) were to be undertaken.

One day, it occurred to him to examine this cabin, and there, sure enough, in the chest of drawers and elsewhere, confident Huns, thinking that here at least, in the Hunter's

very lair, there would be no searching, had hopefully "posted" the forbidden mail-matter, and had deposited the illicit slabs of rubber. The latter was probably to be regarded less as an act of patriotism—though Germany was woefully in need of rubber—than as a commercial venture. "Dental rubber" is a highly concentrated and pure form of the substance, and was, at that juncture, worth in Germany at least ten times what had to be paid for it in the States.

The Canadian Customs searchers were quite inflexible in their condemnation of everything that could in any way be described as "contraband." Articles found on the persons of the searched, or in their cabins, were collected in separate bags, each labelled with the name of the owner, and sent ashore daily to the Customs Office for closer investigation. Everything, on this second overhaul, found to be legally contraband, was placed in the Prize Court immediately—a bourne from which no Hun traveller's goods ever returned!—and all that was not so disposed of was returned to the ship.

In this way, before representations could be made, the little gold locket of sentimental ladies, or other ornaments (the "precious metals" being contraband), and such things as sponge-bags, vulcanite toilet-table articles, and hot-water bottles (all of them containing rubber), were resolutely "pinched" and carried

off ashore. Even private stores of tins of biscuits, sausages, and other *Delicatessen* (being "foodstuffs"), were removed!

With the temperature standing at 7° below zero, the removal of the hot bottles raised so bitter a cry of lamentation, that it reached the ears of Superior Authority,—this was at an early stage of the proceedings, when the methods of working between naval and Canadian searchers had not developed into the happy smoothness that was reached soon afterwards,—but, alas! too late; the hot bottles and all other "rubber goods" were already in the Prize Court! *Rien ne va plus!* A much sympathising Commander, knowing only too well the temperature of "aboard-ship" beds, removed by so small a space from the level of the frozen sea, found himself compelled to go ashore and buy in the town several bottles, to give to the more delicate of these unfortunate German ladies, replacing those forcibly removed. After this, arrangements were come to, to prevent interference in the future with these small personal comforts.

But apart from these easy "discoveries" of contraband, the ship herself yielded, daily, considerable quantities of letters, rubber, cameras, films (including cinematograph), unpermitted amounts of money,—in one case some thousands of pounds worth of notes,—and other forbidden articles.

Probably the best "haul"

of any, however, was what came to be known as "The Scandinavian Trunk."

This was a brand-new steel portmanteau, of ordinary appearance and medium dimensions, found, in the normal course of search, under the bed-place in one of the cabins. On being drawn forth into the light, it was seen to be heavily sealed over the lock, there being eight or nine large imprints of the Scandinavian Consul-General at New York, on a strip of material stretched over the small elevation carrying the hasp and keyhole. A label, bearing the name and address of the passenger who claimed it, was attached to one of the handles. On being questioned, this person—a "square-head"—declared that the trunk contained diplomatic documents, which he, as a "diplomatic courier," was conveying to Europe, to be handed to his Government; and that, consequently, it was immune from search. Now the law and custom on such occasions is that the seal of an Ambassador or Minister is sacred, and may not be broken; but any other seal, including that of consuls and consuls-general, has no special sanctity and may be ignored, if needs be; and at first it was proposed that this should be done, and the contents of the trunk revealed.

Suspicion lay on them from the outset, for, in the first place, no permission had been given for this particular diplomatic despatch-box to be conveyed in the *Fredrik VIII*;

and, in the second, the person accompanying the trunk, though he described himself as a "diplomatic courier," on examination of his passport, turned out to be nothing of the kind, and was merely a commercial gentleman from New York, revisiting his native land, who had undertaken charge of it.

The trunk was therefore seized, but in view of the possibly grave international trouble involved in taking violent measures with it, information was first sought from Washington. The reply came that the Scandinavian Ministry there stated that the trunk had been sealed by them, and sent by rail, but unattended, to New York. It had arrived there, they said, with the seals broken; the inference being that if any improper, non-Scandinavian documents should now be found in the trunk, they must have been inserted *en route* between Washington and New York; and that the Consul-General at New York had resealed the trunk and sent it on by the *Fredrik VIII*.

It was stated, further, that it contained only the documents relating to some commercial business. Notwithstanding this, however, the Minister would not agree to send an agent to Halifax, who should open and examine the contents in the presence of British officials.

The "business," whatever it was, must have been a large one, as the papers concerning it weighed 100 lbs. It was

strange, too, that, when found, there was not remaining the faintest trace of the original sealing at Washington: all that could be seen on the new and shiny varnish were the fresh red imprints of the seal of the Consul-General, New York.

By some means or another, the fact of the trunk being on board the *Fredrik VIII*, with suggestions as to its suspicious character, leaked into the American papers; and it chanced that, only a short time previously, the revelation had been made to the world, by the United States Government, of the discovery of papers divulging certain proposals of Herr Zimmermann (the German Foreign Secretary) to the Mexican Government. The two facts were immediately seized on by the Press and connected together. Huge headlines appeared: "Zimmermann's Papers found in Bernstorff's Trunk," followed by an account, apparently circumstantial, of the finding of the papers on board the *Fredrik VIII* in the Scandinavian trunk, and dwelling on their importance.

It was amusing to read all this, and then, in the same glance, to see, with its seals all quite intact, "Bernstorff's Trunk" (so-called) reposing in safety in a locked cabin on board H.M.S. *Devonshire*!

Eventually, under orders from the Admiralty, the trunk (still intact) was sent across the Atlantic to their Lordships by H.M.S. *Berwick*, which vessel happened at the time to be sailing for England.

It was escorted by an armed guard from the Admiralty to the Foreign Office, and dealt with there in, no doubt, fitting fashion.

As to its contents, who shall say what, actually, they were? One may at least hope that among them was the Last Straw. The trunk reached England in the middle of March. On April 5th, 1917, the United States formally declared war on Germany.

As to the *Fredrik VIII*, after ten days of as meticulous a search as any ship ever had, she sailed for Denmark on the evening of February 27th, where, in due course, she arrived in safety. The law of "no correspondence with the shore" was so far intermitted, that all letters that had arrived for the ship during her detention in Halifax were handed to their addressees (after censoring) just as the ship sailed; and similarly, but at the last moment also, letters from the ship for the shore were accepted for censorship and forwarding. An undertaking was given by the Captain of the *Fredrik VIII*, on the returning to him of his wireless apparatus, that it would not be employed for private messages until three

days after leaving Canada, and then only to a very limited extent—an undertaking that was honourably kept.

By these means much pro-German propaganda, and many "Protests" arising from the unsparing and scientific thoroughness of the British search, never saw the light; but we had the satisfaction of reading in the local papers of March 13th, after the Huns had reached Copenhagen, that Bernstorff was "Peeved," and had been one of the Protestants.

One can hardly believe that he, or any of his gang, would have been so credulous as to suppose that the search would have been "nominal"; yet it appears they really thought that the Ambassadorial, and even the Consular, baggage would have been exempt. Nevertheless, and for all that, we were told that on the voyage from New York to Halifax, the steamer's wake resembled that of the hare in a paper-chase, as sheet after sheet of (no doubt) extremely interesting "archives" were torn up and disposed of in the all-effacing sea—"spurlös versenkt!"

All—that is, except what was in the trunk!